

My big move

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Last year Alisa Zotimova swapped the soaring market of Moscow for the UK's crunched capital. The associate in Cushman & Wakefield's cross-border capital markets team tells Lucy Scott why London is still swinging

After five years as an office leasing agent in Moscow, I decided it was time to understand what it was like to work in a mature city. Russia's property market is only 10 to 15 years old, and although it is young and on the up right now, one day things will be different. When that time comes, I'd like to have the right experience to deal with it.

I got into property by accident. I had been running a restaurant in Moscow for a friend, and some of the Jones Lang [LaSalle](#) staff ate there on a regular basis. They knew my English was good and that I had a finance degree, and they encouraged me to apply for a job. I've been

doing this now for six years, but I am considered very experienced in Russia because the market is so young.

I moved to London last July. I work with Russians who want to invest in Europe, but that is not a big part of my job because they typically prefer buying high-end residential buildings in Belgravia to commercial property. I spend most of my time working with people looking to invest in Russia.

What struck me initially about London was how the brokerage market was far less energetic and aggressive than back home. In Moscow, it is still largely commission-based – you eat what you kill, and this means you are really motivated to do deals. In London, winning assignments seemed easier – you would meet someone over lunch and agree to do business. Perhaps this was because there was enough out there for everyone to share. Now that this is not so much the case, people are being more proactive.

Green and pleasant land

Compared with Moscow, London is a much healthier place to live because it is less congested and there are so many more green spaces. There is also a greater sense of the work/life balance. Moscow is more like New York – it's all about work and money, and the hours there are incredibly long.

There are things I can't get used to, like the taxes and the public transport. In Russia, personal income tax is just 13%, but here I pay 40%. Moscow is also a 24-hour city and you can party all night, but in London if you want to get a Tube after 10.30 at night it's difficult. On the whole, however, I do not miss Moscow, although I do miss my family and friends.

The other thing that seems strange is how male-dominated property is in London. The Soviet regime enabled women to have as many professional opportunities as men. In property, at least 50% of employees are women, if not more, and some of the top real estate agents are women.

The old boy network is still a big thing in the UK. You often meet men whose fathers and grandfathers were in the business too, and this makes for a different sort of working environment. I would never be intimidated by a man. I'm feisty and won't be patronised, but I don't think women here are so prepared to stand up to male colleagues.

The main skills needed for a job as a property agent in Russia are to speak good English and to be client-orientated, and women tend to be better at both. I think that when Russian life changed during the 1990s, women were better at adapting. They were far more eager to latch on to the opportunities that capitalism offered.

The wealth of opportunity and the scarcity of human resources in Russia means I could definitely be making more money there. But, for me, it's worth earning less to get some great experience in what is the real estate capital of Europe.